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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S POLITICAL PARTIES: ISLAMISTS, LEFTISTS, NATIONALISTS AND CENTRISTS

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm. Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

1. (U) This cable provides background on Jordan's political parties participating in upcoming parliamentary elections on June 17. Jordan's political landscape, runs the gamut from religious to secular and from left to right, complicated by tribal and family loyalties. The Islamic Action Front, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, is by far the largest, best funded and organized of all the political parties. The other parties, smaller and less well organized, often form blocs to field candidates during parliamentary elections.

ISLAMIST POLITICAL PARTIES

2. (U) The Islamic Action Front (IAF), by far the largest and best organized political party in Jordan, was founded in 1992 by Muslim Brotherhood members and independent Islamists. Membership is estimated to be around 5,000. There are two factions within the party, the "doves" and the "hawks". The doves advocate openness, avoid confrontation with the government and believe in constructive opposition regarding the MEPP. Conversely, the hawks are hard liners who oppose such a conciliatory policy. The IAF platform opposes the GOJ's peace treaty with Israel and calls for the implementation of Islamic Shari'a law. The IAF boycotted the 1997 parliamentary elections protesting the so-called "one man one vote" voting structure which, it claimed, unfairly diluted its true electoral strength. The IAF has announced, however, that although the "one man one vote" structure is still in place it will participate in the June elections.

3. (U) Two other political parties round out the Islamist political scene in Jordan with membership estimates at under 100 for each. The Democratic Arab Islamic Movement (Du'a') and the Muslim Centrist party are both moderate in nature. The Du'a' party is composed of both Muslims and Christians and men and women, its aim being the enhancement of the Muslim-Christian relationship. Its platform supports the Palestinian cause, the independence of the judiciary, better education opportunities, free media and enhanced economic, social, cultural and political domains. It is one of five parties comprising the National Council for Parties Coordination bloc. The Du'a's partners are the National Constitution, Al-Ajyal, Al-Ummah and the Greens.

4. (U) The Muslim Centrist party advocates democracy and pluralism. It is open to all members of the society regardless of their religion, ethnic origin or affiliation. It supports a role for women in society, student movements and the economic and political reforms launched 12 years ago. Many of its members are former Muslim Brothers who either left the movement or were dismissed due to differences of opinion.

LEFTIST BLOC

5. (U) The main leftist party is the Jordanian Communist Party established in 1951. Estimates place membership at under 200 for each of the leftist parties. The party is committed to the causes of the masses, defending their interests and voicing their aspirations. The Jordanian Democratic Left party was established in 1994 by a former Communist party member and sole Communist deputy member in the 1989-1993 parliament. This party seeks to depart from the narrow ideology of Stalinism and opposes Jordan's peace treaty with Israel. The Jordanian People's Democratic party (HASHD), the Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity party and the Jordanian Communist Workers Party round out the leftist political spectrum in Jordan. All three follow a similar leftist ideology which opposes economic reform programs, the Oslo agreement, and Jordan's peace treaty with Israel. The Communist Worker's party also calls on the GOJ to refrain from accepting World Bank and IMF conditions on Jordan, blaming such conditions for the high rate of unemployment in the Kingdom.

NATIONALISTS

16. (U) The Nationalist political parties are offshoots of the Ba'thist pan Arab movement. The main three parties are the Jordan Arab Socialist Ba'thists, the Ba'th Arab Progressives and the National Action Party. They all oppose the MEPP and Jordan's economic reform programs. All three had close affiliations with the leadership in Iraq and Syria. Membership in each party is estimated to be under 200.

CENTRISTS

17. (U) The Centrist parties are the National Constitutional Party, Al-Nahda, the Jordanian Generations Party and the Greens with members numbering in the hundreds. The first three parties all advocate democracy as essential allowing people to exercise their sovereignty and become the ruling power by expressing their will and achieving their aspirations. They all support the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The Greens focus on Jordan's environmental issues and making Jordanians aware of the sources and causes of pollution.

COMMENT

18. (C) Of Jordan's many political parties, the only one considered genuinely influential is the IAF. The rest are small and in disarray. Even with the forming of political blocs to improve their chances during elections, infighting and dissension within the blocs limit their influence over Jordan's political landscape. Evidence of the ineffectiveness of Jordan's political parties is that most members in the last parliament ran as independents with no political party affiliation and the same result can be expected during the upcoming elections. Many analysts blame the GOJ for not promoting a vibrant political environment and argue that the government supports such a political wasteland. For its part, the GOJ states that it envisions the formation of three political parties, left, center and right, as a more viable solution to the current splintered political climate. In our view, while the development of effective political parties is an integral part of the maturation of democracy in Jordan, it is not something that can be done from the top down, but must be an element in the larger progress toward a vibrant civil society.
GNEHM